

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in recognizing Edgar B. "Pete" Downs on the occasion of his 60th birthday and his significant and steadfast national and international efforts to promote the wine industry of America.

SCHOOL READINESS ACT OF 2003

SPEECH OF

HON. CAROLYN MCCARTHY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 24, 2003

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2210) to authorize the Head Start Act to improve the school readiness of disadvantaged children, and for other purposes:

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong opposition to this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, this legislation changes the goal of Head Start from a level playing field for disadvantaged children and their parents to an undefined goal of school readiness. By creating block grants, this measure turns Head Start over to states, but without any of the current requirements related to high quality and comprehensive services that have made the program successful.

While states and localities, such as Nassau County, New York which I represent, are facing their own budget crunches, this legislation will only do further harm to school budgets.

Head Start is an important program for nearly 1 million low-income children and their families throughout the country and on Long Island. Throughout its 35-year history, Head Start has created not only high performance standards, but also a comprehensive system of evaluation and monitoring to guarantee that these standards are met.

The Head Start system for accountability reviews programs once every three years to ensure that the integrity of federal dollars is protected and that our nation's poorest children do not miss a single opportunity to grow and develop.

Head Start's accountability reaches far beyond the typical monitoring done in state pre-school programs. A team totaling as many as 25 reviewers spend a week reviewing every aspect of a Head Start operation, including: the curriculum; family and community partnerships; human resources; program development; teacher qualifications and professional development; physical and mental health; disability services; and language and cultural appropriateness.

The new assessment in this legislation is a narrow one that only collects the data from a direct test of children's knowledge.

This test only asks questions related to literacy, language, and numbers. Child development experts agree that a single direct assessment does not produce quality data on learning.

Using this type of test to hold programs accountable could create a host of harsh results—such as the temptation to only enroll children who face few barriers to learning or to recruit children who will test well—and potentially leaving out children who desperately need Head Start services.

This is especially true for those students with language barriers or learning disabilities. As someone with a learning disability, I know first hand how hard it was to overcome education obstacles. I was lucky enough to come from a very supportive family, but not all children are as lucky.

Head Start is a success and historically has enjoyed bipartisan support. Unfortunately, with today's legislation, this would be for the first time in its 35-year lifetime that Head Start would be considered without strong bipartisan support. Although we should continue to improve the program, we should do nothing to dismantle it. Unfortunately, I think we are headed down that road today, and that is why I urge the defeat of this bill.

UNITED STATES-CHILE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, H.R. 2738 AND UNITED STATES-SINGAPORE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, H.R. 2739

SPEECH OF

HON. EARL POMEROY

OF NORTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 24, 2003

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to vote for these two trade agreements, H.R. 2738 and 2739. I firmly believe that these trade agreements will provide exciting opportunities for the United States, including U.S. agricultural producers. For example, under the Chile agreement, more than three-quarters of U.S. farm goods will enter Chile duty-free within four years, and all tariffs will be phased out within 12 years. Many North Dakota agricultural products, such as soybeans, durum wheat, feed grains, corn, and potatoes will have greatly improved market access.

I am not, however, without concern regarding these, or future trade agreements. Chile and Singapore are examples of countries with laws that reflect core international labor principles. As such, the "enforce your own" laws provision that is included in these agreements is tolerable, although it would be preferable to have additional and independent enforcement mechanisms. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of many of the countries and regions with which the United States is in the process of negotiating trade agreements.

For this reason, I will not support future agreements that do not open markets for United States agricultural products; that do not require adoption and enforcement of the basic prohibitions on exploitive child labor, forced labor, discrimination, and guarantee the right to associate and bargain collectively; or that provide greater rights for foreign investors than Americans in the United States. I look forward to working with my colleagues and the United States Trade Representative in ensuring that these important ideals are honored.

SCHOOL READINESS ACT OF 2003

SPEECH OF

HON. NITA M. LOWEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 24, 2003

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2210) to authorize the Head Start Act to improve the school readiness of disadvantaged children, and for other purposes:

Mrs. LOWEY. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to this misguided legislation.

The father of Head Start, Dr. Edward Zigler, once said, "Learning is not a purely cognitive enterprise—children learn better when they have good physical and mental health and have families whose own needs are met." I could not agree with him more.

The Head Start program merges literacy activities with lessons in good nutrition, vision screenings, and proper hygiene. It also recognizes the need to bring parents into the developmental process by providing them with support services in and out of the home, such as access to comprehensive health care and social workers, peer counseling, and parenting programs.

As a mother and grandmother, I know that it takes a lot more than basic reading skills to get our children prepared for learning. A kid's emotions, personality, and social surroundings are just as important as their I.Q. when first entering school.

Under this bill, however, instead of providing comprehensive family support, eight states could divert the funding to reading and language development-only programs—leaving behind the parental involvement and health components that are key to Head Start.

If the goal was to truly promote reading excellence, then we could expand and increase our investment in programs like Reading First, Literacy Through School Libraries, and Reading Is Fundamental.

Unfortunately, that is not what this proposal is about. Rather, it is a subtle acknowledgment that the Republican Congress has not fulfilled its promise to supersize the federal government's education budget. By giving states the right to divert this funding into education programs, Head Start will be likely be used to makeup for the funding shortfalls for the No Child Left Behind Act's programs.

My colleagues, our kids need balanced meals before, during, and after school. They need comfortable, clean clothing in order to learn. And they need safe, structured, and encouraging environments in which to study. Head Start teaches parents these lessons, while also providing our kids with the right tools and motivation to learn.

What happened to the saying—"if it's not broken, don't fix it?!" This program has a proven track record for effectiveness.

While I strongly support the provisions in the bill that improve teacher quality, create accountability measures, and increase Head Start's focus on educational skills—we simply cannot make the drastic changes that will eliminate the very initiatives that keep Head Start strong. I urge my colleagues to join me in fighting to maintain the critical nutrition and health components of Head Start by voting against this bill.